

**Year A: Advent 1b – Isa 2:1-5; Ps 122; Rom 13:11-14; Mt 24:36-44  
St. Barnabas, Florissant – December 01, 2019**

**Focus Sentence:** Advent is a time for Watching, Learning, Waiting.

### **SERMON**

**I offer these thoughts in the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit....**

Something NEW is being announced this morning! Some 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah is experiencing a vision of a new place for the presence of the Holy and One God. In today's reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, we hear Isaiah's beautiful oracle about the holy mountain which will tower over all mountains, and to which ALL nations will stream and visit and learn "the way God works....so we can live the way we're made."

The new presence of the LORD in this new House will bring a new LIGHT into the world and because of this light there will be no need any longer for "learning war," for nation to fight nation. The peoples of the various nations really will turn their swords into shovels, and their spears into hoes. And if all the nations of the world continue walking up the mountain toward the light, toward the temple of the loving/living God in Jerusalem, then the nations will walk together and live together within that holy light of God.

That mountain, the city of Jerusalem, the Temple.....they together are to center the lives of all the nations. God is taking up residence in a new way and God is inviting the nations of the world into a new way of living from that center. Warring, of course, needs distance from an enemy, but God has come to gather the peoples into a new closeness, to prevent the terrible necessity of relating with others only at "arms" length.

What a wonderful vision with which to begin this new holy season of Advent!

**PAUSE**

This morning's reading from Matthew's Gospel begins with Jesus taking a completely different tack. Jesus is speaking about the downfall of that magnificent temple from Isaiah's vision, the downfall of the holy city of Jerusalem itself. With that unsettling vision in their heads, the Apostles naturally wonder when that terrible event could possibly occur.

The Jerusalem Temple does indeed come crashing down at the hands of the Roman legions around the year 70, some 35 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. And so, in hindsight, it seems that Jesus must have had prophetic insight, or maybe he could simply see which way the political winds were going to blow. But that's not the real issue here.

## **PAUSE**

What Jesus is asking his Apostles to do here is to STAY ALERT rather than simply being prepared because of certain foreknowledge. Jesus is asking his followers to rearrange their thinking so that they'll be more people of FAITH IN JESUS who has come to be the new and personal presence of the Holy and Eternal God in the world.

If the Apostles, and the early Christian community for which Matthew is writing, can trust Jesus as they have always trusted in the permanent presence of the Temple as God's dwelling, then the exact time of the "final" coming of Jesus won't be important.

Jesus uses his listeners' awareness of the Noah story and what was going on during the times leading up to the great flood. As Jesus points out, those people continued living their normal routines, remaining UNAWARE of the call to them until it was too late. And this is a very dramatic picture for Matthew's readers. Jesus really does come, through the pages of the Gospels, to grab the attention of the readers.

## **PAUSE**

This first Sunday of Advent, this first Sunday of a new liturgical year, presents us with readings which ask us to make some “teaching room” in our lives. During my many years of teaching, there was one particular experience which all too frequently occurred, and which never failed to amaze and amuse me.

I would stand before my class and clearly state a time, a date, and/or a place for some upcoming important event. Without fail, and usually within five minutes, questions would come from several students about what time, what day, where, and even *what* exactly will be happening. I’d always taken for granted that my classrooms were occupied by reasonably intelligent young people, but apparently intelligence doesn’t equate to being alert, to being attentive, or even to listening.

In any class, such questions would most certainly arise, and then so would my mouth and cheeks in a big, compassionate smile.

## **PAUSE**

These Apostles of Jesus are just such a “class,” and Jesus is stating clearly, and with graphics, that something NEW is at hand. He’s also stating that, because it is so new, it can be missed all too easily.

And what is NEW, what is not routine, my sisters and brothers, is also LESS SECURE. What is old and familiar is God’s history of lovingly caring for the Jewish *nation*. And what is also old and familiar is the Apostles’ knowledge of that history.

What Jesus is asking of the Apostles, and of us, is a more PERSONAL, a more INDIVIDUAL response and relationship.....rather than a collective, national relationship like the Jews had always had with God. Instead of relying on a tribal history, each follower of Jesus is being called upon to learn about trusting their own personal FUTURES.

In the past, there was a need for swords and spears. In the future, there must be no more learning of war, no more training for war as another Bible translation puts it. And there must be no more training for personal, or for family, or for racial wars either. The past is history, and it's gone. And the future is mystery.

In the past, there was the solidity of the Temple. In the future, there is the learning time to trust the solidity of each person's own relationship with God in Jesus.

## **PAUSE**

"But now, WHEN is this going to happen? What day did you say? Where? Oh, and what exactly did you say was going to happen?"

Don't ask, sisters and brothers! Just stay awake and keep waiting, keep watching, and keep learning. Come, family of Jacob, let's live in the light of God.

After all, this is the season of Advent.

**AMEN.**